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NATO: France, the UK, and the US came under heavy fire in the North Atlantic Council meeting on Wednesday for allegedly failing to inform their allies about the status of current exchanges with the Soviet Union on Berlin.

The criticism was led by Belgian representative De Staercke, vigorously supported by seven other members. These countries argued that the delay in reporting the substance and the interpretation by the three powers of the Russian note of 10 February on Berlin talks did violence to agreements to consult with the Council on Berlin initiatives. It was also contended that if the other allies were not fully informed about Berlin developments, they might not be able to avoid exchanges with Moscow at variance with tripartite policy.

The report to the Council was delayed by France. Paris appears to believe that the three powers and West Germany must decide on a general plan for the prospective talks before they consult with other NATO members.

The US Mission to NATO reports considerable bitterness among Council members who now insist that they should be briefed before an answer to the Soviet note is released. These allies may act to end travel restrictions for East Germany, a move the tripartite powers had hoped to put off until later this spring.

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EURATOM-IAEA: An apparent change in the French position could seriously complicate forthcoming negotiations between EURATOM and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the safeguard arrangements required by the Nonproliferation Treaty.

The French ambassador to EURATOM told the other members last week that Paris now feels an agreement that would limit the IAEA to indirect supervision of EURATOM's own inspection system cannot be concluded. The French say they could not tolerate outside intervention with the EURATOM system and might have to withdraw from it altogether and negotiate their own arrangements with the IAEA.

The US Mission in Brussels cautions that it is not clear whether the ambassador's remarks are a first step toward French withdrawal from the EURATOM safeguards system, a ploy to forestall any change in it, or a tactic to keep open France's options for an indefinite period. However, the mere threat of withdrawal and the crisis this would provoke will serve to limit EURATOM's negotiating flexibility.

The 26-nation IAEA Board of Governors meets next Tuesday, at which time the creation of a safeguards committee will be proposed. The EURATOM nations, while recognizing that such a group is necessary, do not want its terms of reference to be broad enough to permit discussion by other nations of the delicate relationship yet to be worked out between them and the IAEA.

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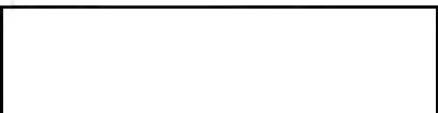
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